

Message Text

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ACTION H-03

INFO OCT-01 EA-06 NEA-07 ISO-00 SS-15 NSC-06 AID-01
/039 W

-----021828 161342Z /50

R 161130Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9395
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 0226

BANGKOK FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN

NEW DELHI FOR CODEL WOLFF

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, SHUM, SN
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW'S CONVERSATION WITH
CONGRESSMAN WOLFF

REF: SINGAPORE 0198

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER LEE ARRANGED FOR A PRIVATE MEETING
WITH CONGRESSMAN WOLFF ON JANUARY 13 AND INDICATED BEFOREHAND
THAT HE HOPED TO PICK UP THE THREAD OF HIS CONVERSATION WITH
ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN THE PRECEDING DAY. WOLFF BEGAN THE
CONVERSATION BY INFORMING THE PM THAT CONGRESS STRONGLY SUPPORTED
ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY ON SUSTAINING A PRESENCE, INCLUDING MILITARY
FORCES, IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC. LEE EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION.
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WOLFF THEN ASKED IF PERCEIVED CHANGE IN U.S. POLICY DURING THE
LAST YEAR HAD CREATED APPREHENSIONS FOR PM LEE OR HIS COLLEAGUES.
LEE INDICATED HE FORESAW REAL /PROBLEMS" FOR THE U.S. IF THE
ADMINISTRATION'S EMPHASIS ON HUMAN RIGHTS WERE TO TAKE PRE-
CEDENCE OVER OTHER ASPECTS IN U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS. HE ADDED
THAT APPLICATION OF U.S. STANDARDS AND EXPERIENCE IN HUMAN
RIGHTS COULD CREATE DIFFICULTIES IF APPLIED WITHOUT REGARD

FOR DIFFERING HISTORICAL SITUATIONS AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS. LEE NOTED THAT UNEVEN APPLICATION OF THE POLICY WOULD ALSO BE REGARDED BY ASIAN NATIONS AS HYPOCRISY. WOLFF EXPLAINED THE DEEP CONVICTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS WHICH CHARACTERIZED PRESIDENT CARTER AND ADMINISTRATION MEMBERS SUCH AS ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN, AND NOTED THAT THE PRESIDENT'S INTENT WAS NOT TO INTERFERE IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF OTHER COUNTRIES, BUT TO PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER COUNTRIES THROUGH THE U.S. POSITION. HE THEN COMMENDED LEE ON BRINGING TOGETHER IN REASONABLE HARMONY PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES AND RACES.

2. CHAIRMAN WOLFF THEN TURNED TO THE SUBJECT OF VIETNAMESE "BOAT CASE" REFUGEES, VOICING WASHINGTON'S CONCERN THAT REFUGEES WERE AT THAT MOMENT DYING AT SEA. HERE THE PM REITERATED THE POSITION HE HAD TAKEN WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN THE PRECEDING DAY (REFTEL)N EMPHASIZING THE DEGRADING EFFECTS OF LONG PERIODS IN A TRANSIT CAMP. LEE ALSO OUTLINED THE REASONS SINGAPORE COULD ACCEPT NO MORE REFUGEES PERMANENTLY. HE REPEATED HIS CONCERN OVER UNHCR GUARANTEES AS THE HIGH COMMISSION COULD NOT ISSUE VISAS, AND STRESSED THE NEED FOR A GLOBAL PROGRAM, NOT LIMITED TO THE U.S., TO ESTABLISH QUOTAS, THE PM SAID HE WAS WILLING TO PROCEED WITH A TRANSIT CAMP ONCE HE RECEIVED PRIVATE ADVANCE ASSURANCES FROM RECIPIENT COUNTRIES AS TO THE NUMBERS THEY WOULD ACCEPT. FINALLY HE STRESSED THE NEED TO AVOID PUBLICITY IF TRANSIT FACILITIES WERE ESTABLISHED. AT THE CLOSE OF DISCUSSION OF THE REFUGEE QUESTION, WOLFF INTRODUCED HIS IDEA

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OF ESTABLISHING AN ASIAN-PACIFIC INTER-PARLIAMENTARY GROUP. PM LEE WARMLY ENDORSED THE PROPOSAL. END SUMMARY.

3. ON JANUARY 13, PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW ARRANGED FOR A PRIVATE MEETING WITH CONGRESSMAN WOLFF, CHAIRMAN OF THE EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE, STATING TO ME IN ARRANGING FOR THE SESSION HE HOPED TO PICK UP THE THREAD OF HIS CONVERSATION WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN THE PRECEDING DAY. IN THE MEANTIME I HAD DISCUSSED THE DERIAN CONVERSATION WITH CHAIRMAN WOLFF, AND SUGGESTED THAT HE MIGHT WISH TO BRING UP AGAIN THE QUESTION OF A TRANSIT CAMP IN SINGAPORE FOR VIETNAMESE "BOAT CASE" REFUGEES.

4. CHAIRMAN WOLFF BEGAN THE CONVERSATION BY INFORMING PRIME MINISTER LEE THAT THE POLICY ON SUSTAINING THE U.S. PRESENCE IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, INCLUDING THE MAINTENANCE OF POWERFUL U.S. FORCES, WAS NOT ONE WHICH WAS LIMITED ONLY TO THE ADMINISTRATION BUT WAS STRONGLY SUPPORTED BY THE CONGRESS AS WELL. THE U.S. WAS A PACIFIC NATION AND WOULD REMAIN SUCH. THE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. GROUND FORCES IN KOREA HAD BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY THE ACTUAL INCREASE IN U.S. AIR POWER, AND WE WERE CONFIDENT THAT THE SOUTH KOREANS WERE CAPABLE OF DEFENDING THEMSELVES WITH THIS AID.

THE BASE NEGOTIATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES WERE PROCEEDING,
WHICH SHOULD HELP MAINTAIN THE U.S. POSITION IN THIS REGION.
CHAIRMAN WOLFF WANTED TO GIVE ASSURANCES
TO PM LEE ON THE CON-
TINUITY OF THE U.S. ROLE, AND ALSO WISHED TO INFORM THE PRIME
MINISTER THAT HE COULD EXPECT CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT AS WELL FOR
SINGAPORE'S SECURITY NEEDS. PM LEE EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION.

5. CHAIRMAN WOLFF ASKED IF THERE HAD BEEN ANY APPRECHENSIONS ON PM
LEE'S PART OR AMONG HIS COLLEAGUES REGARDING CHANGES WHICH THEY
MAY HAVE PERCEIVED DURING THE PAST YEAR REGARDING U.S. POLICY.
PM LEE SAID THAT ANY CHANGES IN WASHINGTON,S OUTLOOK CREATED
ANXIETIES; IF SHIFTS IN EMPHASIS OVER THE PAST YEAR
REPRESENTED MERELY CHANGES IN STYLE, THIS COULD BE LIVED WITH
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BUT WHAT WAS MORE WORRISOME WAS THE POSSIBILITY OF
ALTERATIONS IN BASIC POLICY. PM LEE INDICATED BY THIS HE MEANT
THE ADMINISTRATIONS'S EMPHASIS ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN ITS APPROACH
TO FOREIGN RELATIONS, AND HE FORESAW SOME "REAL PROBLEMS"
FOR THE U.S. IF THIS PARTICULAR ELEMENT WERE TO TAKE PRECEDENCE
OVER OTHER ASPECTS IN U.S. RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES. THE
APPLICATION OF U.S. STANDARDS AND EXPERIENCES IN HUMAN RIGHTS
COULD GENERATE REAL DIFFICULTIES IF THE U.S. WERE TO APPLY
THESE WITHOUT REGARD FOR DIFFERING HISTORICAL SITUATIONS AND
SOCIAL SYSTEMS. MOREOVER, THERE WOULD CERTAINLY BE AN ADVERSE
REACTION ON THE PART OF ASIAN COUNTRIES IF, SAY, THE U.S.
CRITICIZED THAILAND AND THEN THE U.S. PRESIDENT PROCEEDED TO
HAVE DINNER WITH THE SHAH OF IRAN WITH HIS SAVAK FOLLOWED
BY A MEETING WITH KING KHALID OF SAUDI ARABIA WHERE THEY CUT
OFF HUMAN HANDS AS A PENALTY FOR THEFT. WHAT ABOUT ALL THE
F-14S, F-15S, AND F-16S FOR IRAN? P LEE ASKED. AND WHAT IF
NOTHING CAME OUT OF THE BELGRADE CONFERENCE EXCEPT SOME BLAND
STATEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS WHICH LEFT UNTOUCHED THE SITUATION
OF 250 MILLION SOVIETS? THIS WOULD SURELY BE REGARDED AS HY-
POCRISY BY THE ASIAN NATIONS.

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ACTION H-03

INFO OCT-01 EA-06 NEA-07 ISO-00 SS-15 NSC-06 AID-01

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R 161130Z JAN 78

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9396

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 0226

6. CHAIRMAN WOLFF EXPLAINED THE DEEP CONVICTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS WHICH CHARACTERIZED PRESIDENT CARTER AND MEMBERS OF HIS ADMINISTRATION SUCH AS ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN. CHAIRMAN WOLFF ADDED THAT THERE WAS A BELIEF IN THE ADMINISTRATION AND IN THE U.S. IN GENERAL THAT EVENTS OF THE PAST DECADE, E.G. THE VIETNAM WAR AND WATERGATE, HAD OBSCURED THE BASIC U.S. PRINCIPLES IN SUPPORT OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THAT THE TIME HAD NOW COME TO RETURN TO THOSE PRINCIPLES UPON WHICH OUR NATION HAD INDEED BEEN FOUNDED. ALSO, THE PRESIDENT FELT THAT THE SOVIET UNION HAD BEEN PERMITTED TO PREEMPT THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR THE U.S. MOTTO LET THE USSR DOMINATE THIS ISSUE AND OBSCURE ITS OWN POOR RECORD IN THIS REGARD.

7. HOWEVER, CHAIRMAN WOLFF CONTINUED, IT WAS NOT THE PRESIDENT'S INTENT TO TELL OTHER COUNTRIES WHAT THEY SHOULD DO OR TO INTERFERE IN THEIR INTERNAL AFFAIRS. WHAT THE ADMINISTRATION HOPED FOR WAS THAT THE U.S. POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS WOULD STAND AS AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER COUNTRIES TO FOLLOW AS THEY COULD, AND NOT TO CONSTITUTE AN ABSOLUTE STANDARD TO BE APPLIED REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONDITIONS WHICH MIGHT DIFFER CONSIDERABLY

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FROM THOSE IN THE U.S.

8. IN SINGAPORE'S OWN CASE, CHAIRMAN WOLFF SAID, HE BELIEVED THAT PRIME MINISTER LEE HAD ACCOMPLISHED A GREAT DEAL BY BRINGING TOGETHER IN REASONABLE HARMONY PEOPLE FROM DIFFERING CULTURES AND RACIAL BACKGROUNDS. IN HIS OPINION, THOSE ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE PROTECTION GIVEN TO THEM ALSO CONSTITUTED PROGRESS IN HUMAN RIGHTS.

9. CHAIRMAN WOLFF THEN RAISED THE SUBJECT OF VIETNAMESE "BOAT CASE" REFUGEES, NOTING THAT THERE WAS SERIOUS CONCERN IN WASHINGTON OVER THE FACT THAT REFUGEES WERE AT THIS VERY MOMENT DYING AT SEA. PM LEE REITERATED THE LINE HE HAD TAKEN WITH ASSIS-

TANT SECRETARY DERIAN ON SUCH REFUGEES (REFTEL) EMPHASIZING THE DEGRADING EFFECTS ON THE REFUGEES THEMSELVES IF THEY WERE HELD IN CAMPS FOR EXTENDED PERIODS OF TIME WITH NO PLACE TO GO, AND THE SIMILAR EFFECTS ON THOSE WHO GUARDED THEM -- THE TEMPTATION AMONG THE LATTER TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE REFUGEES BY RELIEVING THEM OF THEIR TRINKETS AND BITS OF JEWELRY BECAME IRRESISTABLE. AS TO THE FACT THAT REFUGEES WERE DYING, ONE HAD TO HAVE "CALLOUSES" ON ONE'S HEART. OVER THE LONG RUN IT WOULD BE MORE BENEFICIAL TO THE REFUGEES TO ASSURE THEM DESTINATIONS THAN TO LET THEM LIE AROUND IN DETENTION CAMPS FOR MONTHS AND MONTHS.

10. PM LEE OUTLINED TO CHAIRMAN WOLFF THE REASONS WHY SINGAPORE COULD NOT ACCEPT ANYMORE REFUGEES AS IMMIGRANTS BEYOND THE FISHERMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES HE HAD ACCEPTED IN 1975. HE ALSO WENT OVER WITH CHAIRMAN WOLFF HIS PROBLEMS WITH THE UNHCR: THE HIGH COMMISSIONER COULD NOT ISSUE VISAS, AND WAS OBLIGED TO GO "HAWKING" REFUGEES AROUND AMONG VARIOUS FOREIGN COUNTRIES. THIS WAS A HIGHLY UNSATISFACTORY PROCEDURE. WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS A GLOBAL PROGRAM, NOT LIMITED TO THE U.S. ALONE, CONFIDENTIAL

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TO ESTABLISH QUOTAS FOR THE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES THEY WERE WILLING TO ACCEPT, INCLUDING COUNTRIES SUCH AS SWEDEN WHICH HAD HYPOCRITICALLY SUPPORTED NORTH VIETNAM ALL ALONG THE LINE DURING THE VIETNAM WAR AND WAS NOW UNWILLING TO GIVE THE SLIGHTEST DEGREE OF HELP TO VIETNAMESE REFUGEES.

11. PM LEE DECLARED THAT ALL HE WANTED WAS ASSURANCES, PRIVATELY GIVEN IN ADVANCE, FROM RECEIPT COUNTRIES AS TO THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE THEY WERE WILLING TO ACCEPT. ONCE HE HAD RECEIVED THESE ASSURANCES, BY LETTER OR BY DIPLOMATIC NOTE, HE WAS WILLING TO SET UP A TRANSIT CAMP STAFFED WITH DOCTORS AND OTHER PERSONNEL WHO WOULD PROVIDE PHYSICAL EXAMS, VISA PROCESSING, AND LOOK AFTER THE HOUSING REQUIREMENTS FOR AS MANY PEOPLE AS ALL THE CONCERNED COUNTRIES TOGETHER WERE WILLING TO TAKE. THIS WAS THE POSITION WHICH HE HAD EXPLAINED TO DEPUTY SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER IN WASHINGTON, AND WHICH HE CONTINUED TO SUPPORT.

12. AS A FINAL NOTE ON REFUGEES, PM LEE STRESSED THAT IF TRANSIT FACILITIES WERE SET UP IN SINGAPORE, THERE SHOULD BE ABSOLUTELY NO PUBLICITY. OTHERWISE THERE WOULD BE VAST FLOODS OF PEOPLE ARRIVING WHICH WOULD TEST HIS RESOURCES. HE ANTICIPATED THAT IN ANY EVENT 50,000 REFUGEES MIGHT TRY TO FLEE VIETNAM IN 1978, ALTHOUGH THE NUMBERS COULD WELL BE REDUCED TO TO FIVE TO TEN THOUSAND IF THE VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES TRIED TO RESTRICT THE FLOW IN ANY SERIOUS WAY.

13. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE DISCUSSION, CHAIRMAN WOLFF NOTED

THAT HE WAS INTERESTED IN SETTING UP AN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY
GROUP REPRESENTING PARLIAMENTARIANS FROM VARIOUS ASIAN-
PACIFIC COUNTRIES AND THE U.S., WHICH, AS HE HAD NOTED, WAS ALSO
A PACIFIC POWER. HE HAD RAISED THIS PROPOSAL IN ALL OF HIS
PRECEDING STOPS AND HAD FOUND AN ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE. PM LEE
ALSO ENDORSED THE PROPOSAL, SAYING THAT IT SOUNDED LIKE AN
EXCELLENT IDEA.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HUMAN RIGHTS, REFUGEES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978SINGAP00226
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780022-1105
Format: TEL
From: SINGAPORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Line Count: 292
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION H
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 SINGAPORE 198
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3767655
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW'S CONVERSATION WITH CONGRESSMAN WOLFF
TAGS: SREF, SHUM, SN, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/bf8b63e3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014